



Office for Commonwealth Development

Examples of Smart Growth in Massachusetts

The Office for Commonwealth Development encourages more concentrated development through financial incentives and technical assistance, but private developers and many cities and towns in Massachusetts already see compact, transit-oriented growth on underutilized “infill” land as the wave of the future.

Smart growth projects and initiatives across the state, from zoning reform to mixed-use, urban-village style development, include:

Abington-Rockland-Weymouth (South Weymouth Naval Air Station). The national development company LNR Property Corp. is set to build 2,855 townhouses, condominiums and apartments, all on lots less than 5,000 square feet, and 2 million square feet of commercial and retail space to create a new urban village on the 1,400-acre South Weymouth Naval Air Station. The redevelopment of the closed air base with concentrated, mixed-use, transit-oriented development is a showcase project for the US Environmental Protection Agency, the largest New Urbanist-style project in New England, and one of the premiere smart growth initiatives in the country, comparable to the redevelopment of the closed Stapleton airport in Denver, which is similarly being filled in with homes and stores and offices. The new development will have the look of a traditional New England village, thanks to the San Francisco design firm SMWM, along with Victor Kohl and Dover Associates. The project includes at least 500 homes that will be clustered alongside the Old Colony line commuter rail stop (South Weymouth, Trotter Road), plus a series of playing fields and an environmentally friendly golf course.



Amesbury. The Lower Millyard area is the focus of a sweeping redevelopment plan that includes the relocation of a public works facility, a transportation center, reduced parking requirements, senior center, residential and commercial development, a new park with historic museums, and expansion of the Powow Riverwalk into the downtown.



Attleboro. The city of 42,000 on the Massachusetts-Rhode Island border is revitalizing its downtown, host to a commuter rail station, a hospital, a branch of Bristol Community College and an impressive stock of older manufacturing buildings. The effort began in 2003, including plans for an inter-modal transportation center and streetscape improvements, and continues with up to 1,000 potential new homes in vacant downtown buildings. Attleboro used state smart growth funding to do a master plan and designed a District Improvement Financing (DIF) proposal to secure funding for improvements. Next steps include moving a public works facility to free up



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land for housing and mixed-use development near the train station and daylighting the Ten Mile River.

Barnstable. The revitalization of downtown Hyannis has drawn much attention, as Barnstable rezoned the area to promote multiple uses along and around Main Street, and designed enhancements to wastewater, roadway and sidewalk infrastructure to support the reinvention of this thriving town center.



Boston. Infill, industrial land reclamation and transit-oriented development is charging ahead from the South Boston Waterfront to Bulfinch Triangle, near TD Banknorth Garden. In Jamaica Plain, 430 homes and 170,000 square feet of recreational, cultural, institutional, retail and office space is envisioned at the Jackson Square, on the Orange Line, joining other TOD projects include Bartlett Yard near Dudley Square in Roxbury, Mattapan, and stations along the Fairmont Line in Dorchester.

Brockton. The City of Champions is host to a minor league baseball team in a stadium that is a popular destination, and in the downtown area, a new courthouse, state-supported park, and an improved inter-modal center have added vitality. One of the large mills on the east side of the commuter rail station has been converted to condominiums. The city is currently studying redevelopment of other mill buildings for housing within walking distance of commuter rail, and is investigating a 40R district at the train station.

Cambridge. Cambridge is home to a number of smart growth practices, ranging from an inclusionary zoning policy to innovative street design and bicycle lanes, but the major urban “infill” mixed-use development on the way for the city is North Point -- 2,700 homes, 10 acres of new parks that will double as a stormwater management area, 2.2 million square feet of laboratory and office space, and 150,000 square feet of retail, on 45 acres of rail yards between McGrath-O’Brien Highway and I-93 just north of the Charles River. A new Lechmere station on the property will set the stage for the Green Line extension through Somerville; there will be bike repair and storage facilities for the Minuteman Path, envisioned to come in through the Alewife area and Somerville.



Carver. This Southeastern Massachusetts town used a smart growth technical assistance grant to complete a comprehensive zoning update, including establishing a by-right cluster subdivision provision, an update of the section on conservation subdivision and the townhouse bylaw, a revision of setback requirements and an expansion of the village district. The town also adopted a new bylaw on accessory apartments, a key ingredient in producing affordable housing.

Easthampton. Honored with a Governor's Smart Growth Award, Easthampton is another older mill community using a strategic planning effort to revitalize its center. The first step was to legalize a mix of uses in its mills, and to design and install streetscape and park improvements at Lower Mill Pond. Easthampton has also sought to protect its farming areas outside of the downtown, most recently by adopting a Transfer of Development Rights bylaw – a technique spelled out in the Smart Growth Toolkit.



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Haverhill. This Merrimac River valley city once known for its shoe manufacturing is considering establishment of a Chapter 40R district for its downtown, where the national developer Forest City is set to rehabilitate an old mill building, steps from the commuter rail station. The city is coming up with a creative parking strategy to balance the needs of commuters, residents and visitors in its traditional urban street grid featuring retail and restaurants.

Lynn. Residential development adjacent to the commuter rail station has been popular, reflecting the demand for more affordable homes and shorter commutes. In 2003, Lynn eliminated parking requirements for existing structures in their central business district. City officials say that move has helped smooth the way for 200 new homes in the last two years, and the 70 homes set to become available in 2006. The lifting of rigid parking requirements can make it much easier to re-use, rehabilitate and preserve older buildings. Lynn is also working on ways to improve its waterfront.

Medford. National Development's Station Landing, which includes 292 apartments over 25 retail stores, plus 165,000 square feet of office space, and an additional 12-story building with 127 condominiums and a three-story fitness center, is taking shape on the banks of the Mystic River at Medford's Wellington Circle Orange Line station. Medford also hired Sasaki & Associates to write a master plan for revitalizing Medford Square.



Newbury/Newburyport. A 20-acre site near the commuter rail station was the focus of a study for a transfer of development rights program, to steer development plans for environmentally sensitive open space areas in both communities to this pedestrian-oriented area around the station. Total residential development could include up to 600 homes, steps from the train station. The community is also considering a 40R district.

Newton. The Garden City has convened a citizen-based task force to foster the redevelopment and enhancement of Newton Centre – a classic example of transit-oriented development (Newton Centre, Green Line), but currently lacking housing in the commercial district. The Newton Centre Renaissance Task Force has been charge by Mayor David Cohen to identify the potential for redevelopment and improvement of Newton Centre and to develop appropriate zoning improvement and financing alternatives. Newton is also home to a major new transit-oriented development project, Arbor Point at Woodland Station, also on the Green Line.



Northampton. The highest scoring community in the Commonwealth Capital program, Northampton passed the Community Preservation Act last November, and has for years worked to change its zoning to create a consistent, traditional, vibrant downtown, with a mix of commercial, residential, entertainment, civic space and arts-related activities. Northampton is also in the process of redeveloping its former state hospital site into a mixed-use village center.



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Pittsfield. One of five cities in the country to receive a special grant for revitalization by the American Institute of Architects, Pittsfield is investigating downtown zoning that would dovetail with a 40R district, and is in the midst of cleanup and redevelopment of General Electric property. The city has developed low-impact development and new stormwater management regulations, and just completed a Downtown Streetscape Plan with a set of design recommendations to make the downtown more attractive and pedestrian friendly. The long-closed historic Colonial Theatre is being rehabilitated into a performance arts center.

Plymouth. Home to the Pinehills, which used low-impact development practices, Plymouth passed the Community Preservation Act, a transfer of development rights bylaw, and is weighing a 40R district at the former Cordage ropemaking factory site at the North Plymouth waterfront, where developers have proposed a massive rehabilitation for 700 new homes, accessible to commuter rail.



Revere. Mayor Thomas Ambrosino is leading an effort with the Office for Commonwealth Development, MBTA and the Department of Conservation and Recreation to transform a series of parking lots adjacent to the Wonderland Blue Line station into 1 million square feet of mixed-use development, steps from Revere Beach. Developers are expected to respond to a request for proposals this spring, with the goal of a groundbreaking by 2007. The new homes and a possible hotel would be 10 minutes to Logan Airport and 15 minutes to downtown Boston.

Somerville. Somerville is host to a collection of smart growth initiatives. At Assembly Square, Maryland-based Federal Realty is set to redevelop old railroad yards and vacant lots adjacent to the shopping center and on the banks of the Mystic River, with a possible future Orange Line station a centerpiece for compact, mixed-use development, including homes, retail and office space. Just to the west, the proposed Green Line extension from Lechmere to Medford Hills, including a spur to Union Square, was designed in tandem with plans for development clustered at all the future stations. The Brickbottom area, an industrial district just north of Lechmere, is the site of millions of square feet of new development.

Westwood. Town officials are working with Cabot, Cabot & Forbes and New England Development in the planned transformation of the 135-acre University Avenue office and industrial park, at the Route 128 commuter rail and Amtrak station, into a mixed-use development with 1,000 planned homes, 1.2 million square feet of retail, 2 million square feet of office, laboratory and R & D space, and 400 hotel rooms. Westwood changed the zoning for the area and integrated affordable housing and water-supply protections into the planning effort. The retail area is based on a walkable, urban-village design similar to Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod or City Place in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Worcester. The next stage of revitalization for Worcester's downtown, after the remodeling of historic Union Station, is underway. CitySquare by Berkeley Investments calls for 900 homes, 407,000 square feet of retail and nearly 1 million square feet of medical and office space, on 20 acres adjacent to the station. The centerpiece is a District Improvement Financing plan that will allow for the replacement of a single-use shopping mall and dramatic public improvements to the area. The 55-acre Gateway Park



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includes 745,000 square feet of mixed-use space and residential development on a cleaned-up Brownfields site.